



## The Level of Attention to Life Skills in the Elementary School Curriculum

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**Abstract:** The aim of this research was to investigate the degree of attention given to skill development in the elementary school curriculum. This study was a descriptive survey conducted to explore and assess the current status of skill development in the elementary school curriculum. The statistical population consisted of elementary school teachers in government schools in Tehran, who were selected using a random sampling method, and the sample size was determined to be 196 individuals based on Cochran's formula. A researcher-made questionnaire consisting of 104 questions was used to collect data. The hypotheses were tested using a one-sample t-test. The results showed that the level of attention given to skill development in the elementary school curriculum was inadequate for the following skill components: self-awareness, courage, emotional and behavioral control, empathy, peer relationships, cooperation, speaking skills, effective listening, honesty, trustworthiness, non-jealousy, creative thinking, critical thinking, problem-solving, time management, hardware and software, global internet network, environmental awareness, optimal energy consumption, waste management, entrepreneurship, financial management, healthy eating, appropriate clothing, and disease awareness. Based on these findings, practical suggestions were provided to enhance the development of these skills in the elementary school curriculum.

**Keywords:** Curriculum, Skill development, Elementary school

## Introduction

According to researchers, skill policies play a crucial role in addressing the job challenges of countries (Bergson-Shilcock, 2020). One of the primary objectives in the education system, and generally in the education system of any country, is to train skilled and competent personnel, and the importance of this matter is doubly significant in developing countries. In some countries around the world, educational planning is based on the approach of workforce needs, and the training of human resources is essentially aligned with the demands of the job market. Education experts believe that foundational education acts as a stepping stone towards higher education and that the benefits derived from higher education are vastly different from those of secondary and tertiary education. For instance, in advanced societies, mere literacy may not be a source of income, but individuals possessing high-level skills can generate earnings and income as long as there is societal demand for that particular skill (Goldojinejad, 2018).

The most essential skills of the new millennium have been introduced under the titles of technological skills, innovation skills, social skills, individual skills, cultural skills, managerial skills, ethical skills,

economic skills, environmental skills, political skills, and research skills ([Islamieh, 2012](#)). The transformation of work and employment nature provides more flexible opportunities for multiple skills and learning. Skill-based education focused on the industry can bridge the skills gap and increase job opportunities for students ([Tiwari & Malati, 2020](#)).

Knowledge sharing and skill development are considered one of the most important key factors for economic success in a country ([Asadi, 2019](#)). The fundamental transformation document for education in Iran has emphasized the promotion of entrepreneurial capabilities among graduates and entrepreneurship education in the education system. However, the results of field studies and investigations on the employment status of graduates indicate an undesirable state of the business environment and skills ([Hejazi & Bakhtiari, 2019](#)).

Education and upbringing are valued institutions that society expects to always include various skills and offer practical training to students within their curriculum. In the education system, the elementary level holds particular significance as it provides the foundation and conditions for personal development and all-around growth of individuals during this stage. According to experts, this period offers the most suitable opportunity for learning and education and serves as the beginning of a child's talent development. If children fail to acquire essential skills during this stage, it may become difficult to compensate for the lack of skills in later stages of growth. Therefore, giving attention to and emphasizing skill development at the elementary level is indispensable for enabling individuals to cope with life's pressures, lead a purposeful life, and be adaptable in facing life challenges, fostering constructive interactions with others for maximum benefit and minimal harm, building elevating and nurturing interpersonal relationships with minimal conflict, handling life crises with proper management and for the greatest good, and taking on individual and social responsibilities effectively in life.

Moreover, the philosophy behind the establishment of any institution or organization is to respond to specific needs and values. The education system is shaped to educate and deliver competent and desirable citizens in accordance with social needs and values. However, studies indicate that the attention given to personal, cultural, social, and political skills in the elementary level textbooks of the country is undesirable ([Bodaghian & Nateghi, 2016](#)).

Furthermore, since students will have future careers, it should be noted that a large number of graduates from the education system are added to the army of unemployed individuals every year. These graduates lack the necessary skills demanded by the country. This signifies the inefficiency of the education system in skill development for students. On the other hand, some parents, realizing this issue too late, spend money on developing skills for their graduate children. This leads to frustration among their children and creates a sense of despair, and also pessimism about the effectiveness of the education system. It

also leads to financial burden on families and wastes the time of their children, which, in turn, delays their entry into the job market and forming families ([Moradi Dehaghi, 2019](#)). However, it should be mentioned that one of the reasons for unemployment in Iran is the lack of required skills by job seekers. Providing skill training plays a crucial role in reducing the unemployment rate ([Moghimi et al., 2019](#)). The skill training model, due to its association with active learning principles such as practice, collaboration, feedback, and adherence to these principles, has been one of the most effective and commonly used educational options in the process of teaching and learning in the elementary curriculum in recent decades. Through this model, students have the opportunity to practice, apply their knowledge in action, and utilize skills such as apprenticeship, handcrafts, and practical applications in their daily lives as well as in practical classes within the elementary curriculum ([Nowrozi Masiri et al., 2019](#)).

[Adibmanesh and Sadr \(2021\)](#) focused on designing a desirable model for enhancing elementary students' life skills. The findings indicated that life skills education for elementary students is conducted in three broad areas of knowledge, attitude, and ability, and through four elements of objective, content, method, and assessment.

[Naseri et al. \(2019\)](#) conducted research on the indigenous model of branding skill training and individual and social entrepreneurship in Iranian schools. The results indicated that internal enabling factors include dimensions such as managerial risk-taking, financial, social, and legal infrastructure, strategic planning, and support from senior organization managers. External enabling factors include dimensions such as organizational brand power, government support, and incentive schemes from higher-level institutions.

[Khairinia Firouzjaei \(2019\)](#) conducted research titled "Content Analysis of Skill Training in Elementary School Textbooks." The results indicated that a total of 14,941 references were made to skill training components. The highest frequency was related to the component of information literacy with 6,143 occurrences, and the lowest frequency was related to the planning component with 91 occurrences. The highest informational load and importance coefficient were related to the information literacy component, while the lowest was related to the problem-solving component.

[Suswandari et al. \(2020\)](#) conducted research on the social skills of elementary school students as an essential aspect of curriculum implementation with a scientific approach. The results showed that 35% of students have sufficient mastery of social skills, while the remaining 65% do not demonstrate complete mastery of social skills in the classroom. The data indicated that social skills of elementary school students are still limited, which could lead to a less than desirable scientific approach in the curriculum.

Primary education is a very important and crucial stage for the growth, upbringing, and personality development of children, as it forms the foundation for their future education. The significance and necessity of skill development in this stage are due to the fact that if these skills (critical thinking, creativity, innovation, problem-solving, self-management, risk-taking, etc.) are not introduced from an early age, the effectiveness and influence of education will diminish with the formation of the personality in later years. The impact of this developmental stage on the formation of various skills in children will fade over time. Individuals who have not learned the correct methods and approaches for different skills and have not acquired the necessary skills to adapt to their families and society will face serious and numerous challenges in their personal and professional lives.

Moreover, it is crucial and essential to focus on skill development in students from the primary level. They need to learn how to be resilient, flexible, and approach problems and challenges in life as solvable puzzles. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the attention given to skill development in the primary education curriculum. As previous researchers, like [Taghei et al. \(2019\)](#), have also emphasized, having an appropriate curriculum plan is a significant process that specialists employ to create motivation and proper learning in students. Integrating concepts related to various skills into the curriculum helps students perceive these skills not only as subjects in a lesson but also as their human duties and responsibilities. Students learn in schools to acquire knowledge and values that they will apply in their lives, making curriculum planning vital and fundamental. Thus, it underscores the importance of designing a skill development curriculum pattern for the primary level more than ever before. Therefore, the main question for the researcher is: What is the current level of attention given to skill development in the primary education curriculum?

## Material and Methods

This research is applied research and aims to investigate the status and assess the level of attention to skill development in a specific educational period. The statistical population consists of elementary school teachers in government schools in Tehran, Iran. The researchers used random sampling method to select the participants, and based on their inquiry, the total number of elementary school teachers in District 10 of Tehran was 400 individuals. The sample size was determined using the Cochran formula and turned out to be 196 individuals. The tool used in this study was a Likert scale questionnaire with 5 degrees. The questionnaire contained 104 statements that were scored on a scale of 1 to 5. The validity and reliability coefficients of the questionnaire were provided in Table 1. For data analysis, the one-sample t-test was used.

**Table 1.** The validity and reliability coefficients of the questionnaire

| Component                                     | Cronbach's alpha | Content validity |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| Self-Knowledge                                | 0.73             | 0.82             |
| Courage                                       | 0.70             | 0.85             |
| Controlling emotional and behavioral emotions | 0.79             | 0.84             |
| Sympathy                                      | 0.71             | 0.80             |
| Relationship with peers                       | 0.85             | 0.81             |
| Cooperation                                   | 0.77             | 0.89             |
| Speech  | 0.77             | 0.82             |
| Effective listening                           | 0.74             | 0.82             |
| Honesty and truthfulness                      | 0.76             | 0.82             |
| Bailment                                      | 0.71             | 0.85             |
| Not jealous                                   | 0.70             | 0.87             |
| Creative Thinking                             | 0.74             | 0.83             |
| Critical thinking                             | 0.82             | 0.81             |
| Understanding the problem                     | 0.77             | 0.80             |
| Decision making                               | 0.79             | 0.80             |
| Time Management                               | 0.75             | 0.87             |
| Hardware and software                         | 0.70             | 0.89             |
| World Wide Web                                | 0.72             | 0.83             |
| Environment fan                               | 0.78             | 0.84             |
| Optimal energy consumption                    | 0.71             | 0.81             |
| Waste Management                              | 0.73             | 0.81             |
| Entrepreneurship                              | 0.74             | 0.86             |
| Financial Management                          | 0.79             | 0.83             |
| Healthy diet                                  | 0.70             | 0.87             |
| Proper coverage                               | 0.76             | 0.84             |
| Awareness of diseases                         | 0.80             | 0.85             |

## Results

In Table 1, the means and standard deviations of the components are presented. Moreover, the obtained means were compared with the theoretical population mean (3) using a one-sample t-test. According to Table 1, the means of all components are lower than the population mean of 3, and the t-values are also smaller than the critical value (0.96). Therefore, it is evident that in the current situation, the attention to skill development in the elementary school curriculum is not appropriate for each of the skill components.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of variables

| Component                                     | Mean   | SD      | T value | DF  | p    |
|---|--------|---------|---------|-----|------|
| Self-Knowledge                                | 2.9439 | .97261  | -.808   | 195 | .420 |
| Courage                                       | 2.6122 | 1.24968 | -4.344  | 195 | .000 |
| Controlling emotional and behavioral emotions | 2.3078 | 1.26488 | -7.661  | 195 | .000 |
| Sympathy                                      | 2.4872 | 1.28321 | -5.594  | 195 | .000 |
| Relationship with peers                       | 2.7211 | 1.37846 | -2.833  | 195 | .005 |
| Cooperation                                   | 2.5293 | 1.21822 | -5.409  | 195 | .000 |
| Speech  | 2.4694 | 1.13751 | -6.531  | 195 | .000 |
| Effective listening                           | 2.6803 | 1.08122 | -4.140  | 195 | .000 |
| Honesty and truthfulness                      | 2.8129 | .97146  | -2.696  | 195 | .008 |
| Bailment                                      | 2.8350 | .90676  | -2.547  | 195 | .012 |
| Not jealous                                   | 2.8895 | .94385  | -1.640  | 195 | .103 |

|                            |        |         |         |     |      |
|----------------------------|--------|---------|---------|-----|------|
| Creative Thinking          | 3.0799 | .79106  | 1.415   | 195 | .159 |
| Critical thinking          | 2.9407 | .95176  | -.872   | 195 | .384 |
| Understanding the problem  | 3.0340 | 1.20255 | .396    | 195 | .693 |
| Decision making            | 2.4949 | 1.06861 | -6.617  | 195 | .000 |
| Time Management            | 2.1607 | 1.24022 | -9.474  | 195 | .000 |
| Hardware and software      | 2.2321 | 1.06051 | -10.137 | 195 | .000 |
| World Wide Web             | 2.6233 | .92340  | -5.711  | 195 | .000 |
| Environment fan            | 2.9469 | 1.00258 | -.741   | 195 | .460 |
| Optimal energy consumption | 2.4456 | 1.13774 | -6.822  | 195 | .000 |
| Waste Management           | 2.6190 | 1.10374 | -4.832  | 195 | .000 |
| Entrepreneurship           | 2.9745 | 1.17860 | -.303   | 195 | .762 |
| Financial Management       | 2.9881 | 1.31802 | -.126   | 195 | .900 |
| Healthy diet               | 2.8839 | 1.17516 | -1.383  | 195 | .168 |
| Proper coverage            | 2.8401 | 1.33780 | -1.673  | 195 | .096 |
| Awareness of diseases      | 2.9990 | .75284  | -.019   | 195 | .985 |

## Discussion

Our research results show that in the current situation, the attention to skill development in the elementary school curriculum is not appropriate. As [Magnuson and Starr \(2000\)](#) has pointed out, the elementary school phase is a crucial entry point for a long and important journey of learning and knowledge in students' lives. The curriculum plays a significant role in teaching various skills to students; however, the present study indicates that the attention to skill development in the elementary school curriculum for the identified skill components (individual skills, social skills, communication skills, ethical skills, thinking skills, problem-solving skills, technology skills, environmental skills, economic skills, health skills) is not adequate. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies ([Bodaghian & Nateghi, 2016](#); [Fathi & Moradi, 2014](#)), which showed that the attention to skill development in the elementary school textbooks in the country is undesirable and lacks conformity.

Furthermore, the interviews with the participants in the research also revealed that the status of skill development in the elementary school curriculum is inappropriate and undesirable. In the 6th (2022) and 24th interviews, two respected experts mentioned that there is no attention to skill development in Iran's elementary schools, and the emphasis is primarily on theories. Our elementary education, besides being distant from contemporary educational and scientific standards, lacks attention to skill development in students. After completing the elementary school, a student does not acquire the necessary skills for life but only excels in reading, writing, and sciences. The theoretical nature of teaching and negligence of skill development were also mentioned in the 25th and 5th (2022) interviews. The 17th interviewee considered skill development in the elementary level as education-centered, and from the perspective of the 18th interviewee, there is no special place for skill development in our elementary education.

### **Research Recommendations**

- Use the curriculum to teach crisis management techniques, such as dealing with unexpected events like the COVID-19 pandemic, to students.
- Design activities in elementary school textbooks that motivate students to engage in group projects.
- Teachers should use student-centered learning techniques, including project-based learning, in their teaching methods.
- Emphasize effective communication and listening skills in the activities outlined in the elementary school textbooks.
- Consider elements of space and place in the curriculum to instill desired ethical and moral beliefs and practices in students.
- Assess cognitive and creative activities of students as part of the curriculum evaluation process.
- Utilize student-centered teaching methods to encourage creativity and innovation in students.
- Enable students to engage in discussions and conversations during problem-solving with the teacher's guidance.
- Teachers should present some of their teaching methods online.
- Teach students how to work with electronic tools effectively.
- Include materials in the elementary school curriculum that encourage outdoor learning experiences for students.
- Provide suitable facilities in schools for waste management in group settings.
- Incorporate practical and applicable opportunities in the curriculum.
- Highlight the importance of healthy nutrition and exercise to elementary school students.
- Address communicable diseases and their transmission openly and without embarrassment in schools.

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